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ABSTRACT

CAMILLE's primary objective is to exploit recent developments in multimedia computing to create a flexible, student-centered, electronic language learning environment to support the acquisition of a second language. The consortium's first target was to produce a learning resource for beginners of Spanish and another for beginners of Dutch, as well as advanced-intermediate course materials in French and English for specific purposes. The functional content of Interactive Spanish is designed to encourage the acquisition of a range of communicative skills, i.e., the ability to use language to do things, e.g., using the telephone to make appointments or asking a travel agent to make travel arrangements. Spanish is the primary language of communication between the computer and student, with the exception of the possibility of the student reading--but never hearing--a set of instructions and explanations in his native language. The reference materials provide all information required by the student. Activities in the study unit are introduced in a video sequence and focus on function, grammar, or vocabulary. Audio feedback and a summary of the student's performance are provided. (CK)

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The CAMILLE Project: *España Interactiva*

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In 1992 a group of five European universities, coordinated by the University of Teesside in Great Britain founded, with LINGUA funding from the European Union, the CAMILLE (Computer Assisted Multimedia Interactive Language Learning Environment) Consortium to develop computer assisted multimedia interactive courses in each of the participants' languages, based on the recent completion of *France InterActive*[1] at the University of Teesside. The current members of the consortium and the courses being developed are:

— University of Teesside, Great Britain: *Working in English*

— Université Blaise Pascal and Université d'Auvergne, both in Clermont-Ferrand, France: *Travailler en France*

— Haagse Hogeschool in the Hague, Netherlands: *Interactief Nederlands*

— Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain: *España Interactiva*

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CAMILLE's primary objective is to exploit recent developments in multimedia computing to create a flexible, student-centred, electronic language learning environment to support the acquisition of a second language. Given our Universities' specific needs, the consortium's first target was to produce a learning resource for beginners of Spanish

[1] *France InterActive* is a self-contained, computer-mediated learning resource comprising approximately forty hours of highly interactive training designed to support the acquisition of a basic functional competence in French.

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and another for beginners of Dutch, as well as advanced-intermediate course materials in French and English for specific purposes.

ESPAÑA INTERACTIVA

The contents and structure of the multimedia course material being developed at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia will be best understood by describing *España Interactiva*. *España Interactiva* is a self-contained, computer-mediated learning resource comprising approximately sixty hours of highly interactive training, designed to support the acquisition of a basic functional competence in Spanish. It is aimed at motivated students who may, or may not, have access to a tutor.[2] The functional content of *España Interactiva* is designed to encourage the acquisition of a range of what may be called «communicative skills», by which we mean the ability to use language to do things. This content, therefore, determined our basic pedagogic approach, which, in general terms, may be described as encouraging the acquisition of a «communicative competence» in a language: e.g. using the telephone to make appointments, asking a travel agent to make travel and accommodation arrangements, ordering a meal at a restaurant, asking for directions, etc. Thus from the very beginning of the course, the target language, Spanish, is used as the primary language of communication between the computer and the student.[3] The only allowance made to the student is the possibility of reading —but never hearing— a set of instructions and explanations in his/her native language. Consequently, the activities we have created not only encourage the acquisition of «real-world» competencies, but also require the student to use the target language in order to meet the immediate goal of undertaking the exercise. This may be as simple as understanding some instructions in the target language about what to do next or as complicated as playing and recording a role in a dialogue.

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[2] The system was designed to support learners who have no access to a tutor. However, given the current limitations of machine intelligence, regular contact with a "live" tutor cannot but enhance the learning experience. At Valencia it is our intention to offer regular tutorial sessions in conjunction with *España Interactiva*. These will, however, be considerably less frequent than one would find in a traditionally "taught" course.

[3] Help in the user's first language, whether it be English, French or Dutch is available, but access to it is through the target language, Spanish. Naturally, this access is explained at the beginning of the course.

The design of *España Interactiva* is an attempt to acknowledge the fact that a true linguistic competence is only achieved by *regularly using the language accurately to do something*. To achieve this end we have embedded a variety of goal directed learning strategies in a media-rich electronic information environment that supports the study of the target language. The notion of supporting the study of the language is crucial here. *España Interactiva* is a *learning* not a *teaching* resource. The objective wasn't the creation of software to «teach» Spanish, it was the construction of an environment that would provide the student with all the tools and information, short of a live teacher, that they might need to undertake a beginners level course in Spanish.

Accordingly, when the student enters a study unit in *España Interactiva* the screen they encounter describes, in written form and in audio, a list of learning objectives. This screen, then leads the student automatically to what we call «directorio», where there are button icons representing a grammar book, a dictionary, a book about Spanish culture, and a book about linguistic functions, as well as a table of contents. From here the student may move to any point in the Unit by selecting the appropriate item or they may choose to open any of the reference sources. Since the object of these «hyper»-reference books is to supply the user with information on demand, they may be accessed at anytime during the course. When the user selects one of the reference sources, it is opened as a separate window of information on the screen. It partly overlaps the «study page», but doesn't completely obscure it.

However, before turning to examine the lesson materials contained in a given Unit, a few words about some of the special features of the reference books might be appropriate. Each of these may be approached as a self-contained book in its own right, but our expectation is that they will primarily be accessed in response to particular questions that occur to the user. Of all of the reference books the «dictionary» is perhaps the most unusual. In addition to providing Spanish/native language equivalencies, it provides audio-recordings of native speakers pronouncing each of the words. The

«grammar book» is relatively traditional, but does provide «hyper-links» to exercises embedded in the «textbook» that illustrate, or provide practice on, particular grammatical points. Similarly, the «function book» provides a summary of various discrete «speech acts» under more general headings, like greetings, or asking questions, thus permitting a user to review work that may have been encountered in other parts of the course. Finally, the «culture book» summarises and extends the cultural information that is an integral part of the textbook's course material.

The reference materials thus provide all the information the learner needs to acquire the desired level of competence, but in themselves they offer little guidance as to how to acquire it. This guidance is found in the «lesson materials». In order to provide learners with some «direction» to their studies, these «lessons» are, first, organised into 10 modules, the fifth and tenth of which provide opportunities for review and assessment. Each of these modules is in turn sub-divided into four units which deal with different aspects of a given topic. Each unit represents approximately one hour and a half of interactive study for the learner.[4] However, although each of these modules and units is self-contained, focusing on a particular set of related communication skills (e.g. using the telephone to some specific purpose), they are not totally independent and cannot be approached at random as a collection of linguistic functions to be studied in any order. Rather they are organised into a «course of study». Each new unit and module builds upon the grammatical and lexical content of preceding ones.[5] Consequently, while it is possible for suitably competent learners to begin the course at varying points, it is expected that they would thereafter follow the course as designed.[6]

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[4] The actual amount of time spent by a learner will be determined by how much use they make of the reference materials discussed above, but early trials suggest that just undertaking all the activities available in a unit will take at least an hour and a half.

[5] This is rather less true of the more advanced level courses being developed for the CAMILLE consortium at Clermont-Ferrand and Teesside. At more advanced levels of study it is possible to assume a certain level of basic linguistic competence and hence focus more specifically on, for example, the functional and lexical requirements of a particular task. Consequently, the consortium's advanced level courses will be aimed at the acquisition of specific skills —e.g. attending a meeting, applying for a job— any or all of which may be undertaken in any order by suitably competent students.

[6] However, it should be noted that the underlying "hypertext" structure of the data does make it possible for a user to move from one unit to another during a given session. For example, a student may, while

Similarly the units themselves offer the student a pattern of study, but allow considerable freedom of choice over the exact order in which particular activities are undertaken. The typical structure of a unit is as follows: as mentioned above, on commencing the unit, the student is offered a brief description of the learning objectives contained in the unit. These learning objectives are given in both a spoken and written form. The spoken version is always in the target language but the written also gives a translation in the student's native language.[7] Next the student encounters the «directorio», which includes a table of contents for the unit distributed in three sections: linguistic functions, grammar and vocabulary, following a colour scheme. From here they can access any of the activities available within the unit in any order they wish. However, these activities are normally organised around an «introductory» video sequence which focuses on the specific linguistic skills to be practised within the activities. These skills are further explored and developed in a series of activities and exercises designed to aid in their acquisition. Consequently, the student is strongly encouraged, but not compelled, to watch the video before attempting the exercises.

The video sequence itself is usually between two and three minutes in length and normally takes one of two forms. Most commonly, it is a dialogue between two or more individuals that exemplifies some specific functional competence. The language used in the dialogue also typically introduces some new grammatical and lexical items. However, it is important to note that the student is not simply a passive observer to these video sequences. The software provides the user with a set of video controls identical to those found on a domestic video tape player. In addition to such usual functions as play, rewind, pause and fast-forward, these controls also offer the user an «instant-replay» button which replays just the last complete sentence of the dialogue. It might be said to be

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doing one exercise, look up something in the grammar and from there chose to undertake an exercise designed to reinforce that point before returning to the original exercise.

[7] Prior to commencing *España Interactiva* for the first time, there is a "logon" procedure which admits the student to the environment as a whole and registers them on a database that allows us to keep a record of their performance. The student also has to specify his nationality, so that all the written help available during the course appears in his native language. This will be available in English, Dutch and French.

the equivalent of the linguistic function represented in conversation by the expression «Sorry?». Finally, the control panel also offers the user the opportunity to display subtitles in the target language. Consequently, the learner has considerable control over the pace and content of their viewing, including pausing it to access one or more of the reference sources to clarify problems —e.g. unfamiliar lexical items— as they arise. The video sequence is available in three different video screens: the main video screen which offers the possibility of subtitles, a second one which displays both the video sequence plus the full length written dialogue aiming to encourage some reading practice, and the third which adds to this a short «comprehension» exercise, normally in the form of true/false questions. Interaction is also encouraged by means of a record button which enables the student to play the role of one of the characters in the sequence and listen back to his own recording.

Although the majority of «introductory» video sequences take this form, others, for example the «introductory» videos in every fourth unit, take the form of «documentaries». These «documentaries» differ from dialogues in that they are dominated by a single «voice» speaking on some particular topic and are included for three reasons. First, they provide a valuable opportunity to practise the skill of «listening» by concentrating on an extended piece of speech. Second, the televisual medium is an excellent way of relating information about the cultural background to specific linguistic functions. For example, the unit in the module dealing with shopping skills contains a «documentary» which introduces the differences between the shopping facilities found in small towns or villages, and cities in Spain. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these «documentaries» are included to encourage the acquisition of the skill of reading. The video remains available to the student and they are encouraged to use it, along with all the other reference sources, to assist in their reading.

Normally, a unit contains no less than nine activities in addition to the initial video. These activities are grouped under the three headings of function, grammar and vocabulary depending on their primary focus. These sections follow a colour scheme

whereby every activity or exercise heading under a certain section is always identified by the same colour to allow the learner to know at all times the section he is working on: e.g. function activities are identified with blue; grammar, with red, and vocabulary, with green. The student enters an activity page, by clicking on its icon, which contains interactive audio, role-playing exercises which invite the learner to use language within a functional context.

In part because the team adopted a deliberately eclectic approach to the creation of learning activities, it is difficult to list the full range of possibilities that are available to the learner within *España Interactiva*. Among the more interesting, however, are a larger number of role playing exercises which exploit both interactive video and interactive audio. In these exercises, the student is invited to adopt the role of one of the speakers in a dialogue and participate, by recording their own utterances, in the creation of a new dialogue which can then be played back and compared with a pre-recorded example. (The role of the other speaker is also executed by means of pre-recorded audio or video utterances.) The student is prompted, and can, if necessary, gain access to pre-recorded models, but the objective of the exercise is to engage the student in the «simulation» of «real-life» situations.

There are also a number of more traditional exercises that permit practice with word-order and lists of «keywords and phrases» with their native language equivalents in every unit. These latter are also sound enhanced to provide pronunciation practice and can be scrambled so that the students can quiz themselves. Still more significantly, every activity in *España Interactiva* is sound- or sound- and video- enhanced. The software not only exploits pre-recorded audio or video, it also provides facilities for the students to record and playback their own utterances.

All of these activities are also supported by a number of «context-sensitive» helps. For example, every exercise or activity is introduced by a brief explanation of the subject under study and set of instructions, which are automatically heard when entering the

activity, that tell the student what to do. These «explanations and instructions» are presented «orally» in Spanish, but text versions in both the target language and the native language are also available by clicking on a «Help» button. In addition to this information, the software also provides feedback on, and keeps records of, the learner's performance. Wherever appropriate, immediate audio feedback, both positive and negative (in the target language, of course), is given. There is also a «Your progress» button that provides a summary of the student's performance on a particular exercise, and that information is also stored in a database that can be accessed by the student or tutor in order to gain an overview of the student's performance.

Thus far I have spoken of the CAMILLE *España Interactiva* model of how contemporary computing technology can be used to build resources to support the language learner and tutor. *España Interactiva* is an environment dedicated to supporting learners in the relatively early stages of language acquisition but CAMILLE extends to the utility of this environment to more advanced levels of language acquisition —e.g. acquiring the specific linguistic skills needed to participate in a business meeting. However, for the language professional there is a whole range of other areas of study not obviously touched upon by *España Interactiva* that the new technology can support.

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